

This lesson will explain and help you with the terminology that you would need for stage lighting.

Let There Be Light!

Imagine if you sat in a theater's audience and watched actors stumble around on a dark stage, or even sat in an outdoor theater and tried to watch a show lit only with sunlight. Not very interesting is it?

One of the most critical aspects of a theater performance is the ability for the audience to see the action. In a darkened auditorium, lighting professionals use several types of equipment to produce effects to:

- highlight the main focus of action
- separate foreground from background
- create mood



Stage Lighting Example

Basic Terms

Before delving into the different equipment and techniques, let's look at a few basic terms used in stage lighting. While some of these are terms for equipment, knowledge of them will assist in explaining more complicated lighting technology as we go.

Lamps: lighting term for light bulbs used in theatrical equipment

Fixtures: the light fixture holding the bulbs; if it has no lens it is called an 'open-face fixture'.

Cyclorama: a curved backdrop, sometimes made of cloth, used to create background scenery with colored light and images projected onto it.

Patterns: cut-out design slid into a frame called a 'pattern holder'. These project the pattern onto the stage to create various effects.

Gels: sheets of colored plastic put in front of a light to create a colorful lighting effect. These are placed into a metal holder on the front of a light called a 'color frame'.

Shutters: moveable attachments that cover part or all of a fixture to control the output and shape of the light beam. If shutters have a hinged panel, rather than a sliding track, they are called 'barndoors'.

Snoot: long cylinder attached to light fixtures to help focus the beam, also called a 'top hat'.

Equipment

Lighting systems generally have four types of equipment: fixtures, a control console, dimmers to control the intensity of the light fixtures, and a distribution system to send information from the control console to the other parts.

For this lesson, we'll focus on the fixtures and their two primary functions of accenting and washing.

Accent Lighting



Guitar player in spotlight

Accent light uses bright lights with a focused beam to bring attention to a specific part of the stage, usually where the main action takes place.

Two fixtures fulfill this role, ellipsoidal spotlights and followspots:

- Ellipsoidal spotlights produce a bright beam with features allowing technicians to adjust the focus from sharp-edged to diffused and attachments to hold patterns and gels.
- Followspots produce a bright accent light on a subject in motion, but require a human operator to direct the beam. Think figure skating or dance routines where the light moves around to center on someone who moves around quite a bit.



Ellipsoidal Spotlight

Followspot

Accent lighting fixtures

Wash Lighting

Wash lighting, or **washes**, uses lights without such defined edges to the beam and sometimes dimmer lights to create a soft illumination for the general stage area. Often, this includes colored lights to set a mood or patterns to create an interesting background.

Lighting experts generally use five different fixtures to create washes:



Stage filled with a red wash lighting.

1. Fresnel spotlights are usually placed near the stage and look similar to ellipsoidal spotlights. However, they have a softer-edged beam and cannot use shutters or patterns.
2. Par cans are simple lighting equipment with a bulb and a reflective can around it.
3. Floodlights are also as simple and produce general lighting for the entire stage.
4. Cyc lights are used to give even light across a cyclorama backdrop.
5. Border strips give even, often colored, light across the stage using a light bar strip.



Cyc Lights



Par Can



Fresnel Spotlight

Wash lighting fixtures

Time for a quiz. Let's see how you do.

Name _____ High School:

Mark an "X" in front of the correct answer.

1. If you want to change the color or put a pattern on the backdrop of the stage, what kind of light fixture would you use?

Par Can

Ellipsoidal Spotlight

Flood light

Cyc light

2. What type of lighting do you need if you want to enhance a sad mood on stage with the color blue?

Accent lighting

Cyc lighting

Washes

Spotlighting

3. If you wanted to enhance the focus and sharp edges of a spotlight, what device would you attach to it?

Shutter

Snoot

Barndoor

Par Can

4. What type of lighting helps focus the attention to a particular part of a stage?

Washes

Cyc Lights

Accent Lighting

Fresnel Spotlight

5. What kind of fixture would you use to focus the audience's attention on an actor rollerskating around the stage?

Ellipsoidal Spotlight

Par Can

Fresnel Spotlight

Follow Spot

Answer key:

1. Cyc lights

2. Washes

3. Snoot

4. Accent Lighting

5. Follow Spot

